

More support for Declaration of Table Mountain

African press freedom advocates met in Kenya last week to support the Declaration of Table Mountain, a freedom of expression campaign organised by the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) to repeal criminal defamation and insult laws across the continent.



The inaugural meeting of the campaign's steering committee, held in Nairobi 1-2 September 2010, brought together editors, journalists and activists to provide guidance, expertise and support on the strategic direction of the campaign.

Steering committee

"The formation of a steering committee, made up of some of Africa's foremost press freedom advocates, will give this much needed campaign the boost required to put it at the forefront of freedom of the press in Africa," said Omar Belhouichet, director of the Algerian daily *Al Watan* and a member of the committee.

"We have now made a strong commitment to encourage those African leaders who believe in a free press, and ultimately economic and social development, to sign the Declaration," he said.

The [Declaration of Table Mountain](#), recently endorsed by Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, calls on African states to repeal insult and criminal defamation laws and to promote the highest standards of press freedom. The Declaration was adopted in Cape Town, South Africa, by WAN-IFRA and the World Editors Forum at their annual meeting in June 2007.

Ghana leads Africa in press freedom

Ghana is the only African country to have fully repealed insult and criminal defamation, with a handful of others having partially decriminalised the laws.

Raymond Louw, the leading drafter of the declaration, said it was even more relevant today than in 2007, given recent moves by South African President Jacob Zuma to install far-reaching provisions that potentially shield the government from press scrutiny and criminalise activities essential to investigative journalism.

SA's POI Bill and Media Appeals Tribunal

"The ANC (African National Congress) has put before parliament the Protection of Information Bill and is seeking the formation of a parliamentary appointed Media Appeals Tribunal. Mr Zuma should read the text of the Declaration of Table Mountain and think about whether his new laws promote press freedom or send South Africa back to pre-apartheid days," said Louw, editor and publisher of the *Southern African Report* and a member of the South African National Editors Forum.

Other members of the steering committee include: Cheriff Sy, director of the publication *Bendré* in Burkina Faso and deputy chairperson of The African Editor's Forum; Albert Twizeyimana, a journalist with Radio Rwanda and founder of Journalistes Libres (JOLI); and Gitobu Imanyara, a human rights lawyer, founder of the Nairobi Law Monthly and member of the Kenyan Parliament.

More high profile press freedom advocates who are joining the steering committee will be announced shortly.

Declaration of Chapultepec

Alejandro Aguirre, president of the Inter American Press Association, attended the meeting to share his knowledge of a similar campaign that IAPA has led for 15 years in the Americas.

"The IAPA's Declaration of Chapultepec campaign for freedom of expression has seen 15 countries adopt freedom of information laws and ten countries eliminate insult laws in the Americas. African leaders should sign the Declaration of Table Mountain and urgently implement laws which establish a free press," Aguirre said.

Virginie Jouan, WAN-IFRA's executive director for Press Freedom and Media Development, said the organisation was more than ever committed to supporting a strong, free and independent press in Africa.

"This inaugural steering committee brings together outstanding press freedom advocates from across the continent who will best represent the aims and principles of the Declaration", Jouan said.

The WAN-IFRA Declaration of Table Mountain Campaign is supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. Sida and WAN-IFRA conduct an ambitious strategic partnership to advance media development and press freedom worldwide. A description of the projects conducted under the partnership can be found at <http://www.wan-press.org/pfreedom/articles.php?id=5826>.

The [Professional Journalists' Association \(South Africa\)](#) (ProJourn) has also signed the declaration.

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